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Atari Online News, Etc.
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    - * China To OK Freedoms At 2008 Games! * -
- * Online Chat To Be Used To Solve IT Issues! * -

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->From the Editor's Keyboard           "Saying it like it is!"
      "~~~~~"
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As far as first weeks of autumn go, this one was a terrific one! Sunny days and warm (relatively speaking) temperatures made things great! I took advantage of the good days with a couple rounds of golf. Not too many more left to the season so I'll try to get in as much as possible! With all of these rounds of golf, I'm still not ready to join the Senior PGA Tour!! Not that there would ever be a chance...

Not much else going on these days. I've dusted off the resume and have begun some initial contacts to get a feel of what's out there in the immediate areas of interest to me. Hopefully I won't have to expand the job search. While I'm truly enjoying my self-imposed retirement, I think I need to find something to supplement our finances. I could start to collect my pension in another week or so, but I'd prefer to hold off for as long as possible to maximize its value.

So, in the meantime, while I work out today's golfing kinks, let's move along and get right to this week's issue.

Until next time...

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ARAnyM 0.9.4 Beta Released

ARAnyM 0.9.4 beta and also new AFROS (no longer a disk image!) have been released.

URL: <http://aranym.org/>

Sources for X-Debug Available

Sources for the programming utility X-Debug, written by Andy Pennel, has been released to the public. This piece of software is a debugger that mainly targets Lattice-C but may offer some functionality for other

languages as well. Thanks to being distributed under a very generous legal license it seems that people are free to do whatever they want with the sources.

Read more and download the sources here:

URL: <http://topp.atari-users.net/>

FreeMiNT/XaAES On The ST

Hiya,

As many of you certainly are aware of, FreeMiNT/XaAES have not been running on 68000 machines since XaAES was turned into a kernel module. Reason for this was mainly the lack of test equipment, a problem that has been cured since.

Today's very early pre-alpha binary of FreeMiNT/XaAES consist of 3 sub-directories, and if copied onto the root dir of your boot disk it should enable you to boot right into XaAES with Teradesk launched as desktop. Also note that the sysdir is 1-17-cur for this particular version of FreeMiNT.

In order to use this version of FreeMiNT/XaAES you should have at least 4Mb of RAM. If you have an Atari with 020 or better CPU you are advised to use the latest alpha release instead of this 000-specific build.

Grab the binaries here: <http://xaaes.atariforge.net/>

Regards,

/Joakim

ICQ for Atari - <http://www.ataricq.org>
AES for Atari - <http://xaaes.atariforge.net>
GPL for Atari - <http://topp.atari-users.net>

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Fair warning: Short column this week. There were only a handful of messages this week, and of course not all of them are suitable for inclusion in the column. Some are rants, of course. Some posts go unanswered, and some just aren't helpful to anyone but the original person asking the question.

Of course, I'm not saying that I'm surprised at the minimal message count. I mean, hell, Atari hasn't made a computer in more than a decade. It's not hard to understand why the messages are dwindling. Not

only are there fewer users, there are fewer new things to require questions. Yes, we still get the occasional newcomer who needs to know where the operating system disk is, or how to upgrade RAM, but most of us got through that stuff long ago and its now old-hat.

The up-side is that most of us now seem like techno-gurus to newbies. And thank goodness that most of us handle our techno-know-how powers with more grace and humility than techno-gurus on other platforms... I won't mention any names. <grin>

Well, if the column's going to be short, let it be short. I'll finish up here and we'll get right to the stuff from the USENet, okay?

Oh, and by the way, let's keep the techno-guru stuff just between you and me, huh?

Now let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
=====

Jerome Mathervet asks about an IDE interface:

"Has anyone tried to buy the IDE interface here:

<http://www.paskud.pl/service/service.html>

There's no information in english and I don't know how serious the guy is. Still, at 40 EUR, it's a bargain price for the platform."

Joe Iron tells Jerome:

"I've a MegaST with his interface working quite well. If you want to use only TOS then it is a very good choice. If you want other OSes or for example ATSpeed, then the interface is not compatible."

Jerome tells Joe:

"Yes, I only want to use the TOS. However there's no email to get in touch and like I said all is in polish (including instructions). How did you order?

I expect the interface to be quite slow though (i'd say 100 Kb/s max for an ST) but well enough for the system. Is this what you get, "Joe Iron"?

Joe replies:

"You can find his e-mail address at: <http://www.paskud.pl/>. Click on "e-mail do mnie". Simply write him a letter in English. Though his english is not too good, I could finally buy my interface. Concerning speed: I didn't do deep testing, but the speed is more than acceptable. (if you don't forget, that you use an ST)."

Jerome explains to Joe:

"OK, I'll have a go. I didn't notice the email link because I was using a javascript-free browser. Time to fire the fox.

Actually I'm more interested in storage than speed in this context. But rough figures wouldn't hurt."

Joakim Högberg posts this about FreeMiNT and XaAES:

"As many of you certainly are aware of, FreeMiNT/XaAES have not been running on 68000 machines since XaAES was turned into a kernel module. Reason for this was mainly the lack of test equipment, a problem that has been cured since.

Today's very early pre-alpha binary of FreeMiNT/XaAES consist of 3 sub-directories, and if copied onto the root dir of your boot disk it should enable you to boot right into XaAES with Teradesk launched as desktop. Also note that the sysdir is 1-17-cur for this particular version of FreeMiNT.

In order to use this version of FreeMiNT/XaAES you should have at least 4Mb of RAM. If you have an Atari with 020 or better CPU you are advised to use the latest alpha release instead of this 000-specific build.

Grab the binaries here: <http://xaaes.atariforge.net/> "

'Cyprian' tells Joakim:

"Great News!!

I've checked and it doesn't startup from harddisk:

```
pid 0 (MiNT): parse_cnf: can't open u:/a/mint/1-17-cur/mint.cnf
No init program specified to be started.
```

```
Starting up 'u:/a/mint/1-17-cur/sh'...
error -34.
System Halted. "
```

Odd Skancke tells Cyprian:

```
"> pid 0 (MiNT): parse_cnf: can't open u:/a/mint/1-17-cur/mint.cnf
                                     ^
See this 'a' here? -----
```

This looks to me as if you're trying to start it off the floppy. Could you tell us exactly what you do?

Joakim takes a look and adds:

"his sounds strange. What hardware are you running on?
And how much RAM is installed?

It is clear that the problem is due to MiNT looking for the config file

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Gamers Applaud Playstation 3!  
    " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " Girl Gamers Want Respect  
                                     'Madden NFL 07'  
                                     And much more!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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## Gamers Applaud PlayStation 3

After months of playing the waiting game, serious game fans among the general public finally got their hands on Sony Computer Entertainment's PlayStation 3 (PS3) at the Tokyo Game Show here during the weekend, and initial reactions were all favorable.

Titles such as "Resistance: Fall of Man," "Genji: Days of the Blade" and "Ridge Racer 7" will be among the games available at the console's Japan launch on November 11 but there was also considerable interest in some of the software that is on show in an unfinished state. The show was also the first chance for most potential customers to get their hands on a console.

"Heavenly Sword" from Sony, which is slated for release some time in early 2007, is a swords and sorcery game featuring a heroine on a stereotypically impossible quest. Keen gamer Rei Itoh from Tokyo spent 20 minutes playing the game this morning and was eager to buy both a PS3 and a copy of "Heavenly Quest."

"It has such great graphics - the cut-scenes between games are just like movies," she said, adding that the destructible scenery made hacking to pieces furniture - as well as dastardly opponents - a welcome feature.

Another would-be PS3 owner, Dan Bourque from Canada, waited in line for a taste of the new first-person-shooter (FPS) "Resistance: Fall of Man."

"We shouldn't expect too much from a new console at first, as it's unfair to the developers - they need time to find out what the hardware can do,"

Bourque said.

"A good FPS has to be the benchmark of a console, so I am excited about checking out Resistance," he added. On the sensitive subject of price he said that, although a relative would be buying him a PS3 as a gift, "Six hundred dollars is just way too much - that's a price to make your eyes bleed."

Bourque also singled out the unusual "f1ow," a game featuring simple graphics of wormlike microorganisms moving through water that are controlled using only the PS3 controller's motion sensors, and the off-road racing game "Motor Storm" for praise. "FlOw," he said, was "intuitive and fun but only worth \$10," while "Motor Storm" featured "gorgeous physics and was cool but as hard as hell."

The motion sensing used in "f1ow" is something he hoped to see in more PS3 games in future, but for the meantime he said he would have to get his hit of simple, fun gaming from Nintendo's Wii, which he also intends to purchase if he can "get his hands on one."

When asked for her immediate impression of the PlayStation 3, a Japanese gamer who declined to be named remarked "sugoi kirei," which means "really pretty" in Japanese - a pithy phrase that may well sum-up how the next-generation console battle will be fought in the minds of consumers.

#### 'Madden NFL 07'

Fall is around the corner and that could mean only one thing. Football season is back, and for gamers that means a brand new Madden NFL game for their beloved gaming systems.

EA has released the latest title in the Madden franchise, Madden NFL 07. I'll start out with the most obvious, which is that some aspects "Madden 07" are very similar to "Madden 06," but some key features have been added to give this title its own special glow.

One new feature added to "Madden 07" is the Lead Blocking Control, which allows you to control offensive blockers on a running play. During any running play, pressing the circle button before the snap gives you control of the lead blocker.

You can now use the blocker to create the path that you want then, by pressing the circle button again, you can switch back to runner. This is a very innovative implementation and if you've got a good blocker, you can pick up some major gains. Usable blockers include fullbacks, tight ends and even offensive linemen.

Likewise, the controls to kick a field goal have also changed. You now use the right analog stick in a start and stop motion to fill the kicking meter. It's not that difficult, so gamers should have no problem with it. The graphics have not changed from the previous '06 installment, but they are still better than most other football games on the market.

John Madden still gives his witty commentary throughout the game, while Al Michaels gives the play-by-play. Also featured in "Madden NFL 07" is the ability to transfer your franchise mode files to your PSP and play season games on your PSP, giving your "Madden 07" franchise some mobility.

As usual "Madden NFL 07" has official and authentic NFL plays straight out of the team playbook. You get all the cool formations ranging from Nickel, to 3-4 defensive formations, and the classic I-Form in offense. When in doubt, you can always "Ask Madden" at the play select screen and he'll select a decent play depending on the situation. For the most part, good plays are suggested but it doesn't always work out.

Also featured in "Madden 07" is NFL Superstar: Hall of Fame mode. It allows you to create an NFL superstar and guide his life from the draft to preseason even all the way to the football Hall of Fame if he's good enough. It's a pretty lengthy mode so it will keep you occupied for some time. Of course "Madden NFL 07" carries the official NFL license so you get all 32 official NFL teams, logos and players.

Although there are no major changes to the overall format, "Madden NFL 07" still delivers as usual with new features and strong gameplay. For gamers who have never owned a Madden franchise title, it is a good place to start. If you already own "Madden 06" or are still on the fence for a football title, then check out this latest installment at least for the Lead Blocking Control, it's that good of a feature. This game will definitely satisfy your football needs for the immediate future. Madden NFL 07 is rated "E" for Everyone (Content suitable for ages 6 or older) and is available for the PlayStation 2 game console.

#### Girl Gamers Want Respect In Virtual Man's World

They are the gaming industry's very own suffragettes.

In professional competitions and vast online communities, groups of female gamers are demanding respect from game makers and challenging the assumption that video games are the domain of geeky boys in dark basements.

Four years ago, avid gamers Amber Dalton, 30, and her twin sister, Amy Brady, had never come across another woman during their hours of playing games online and at gaming parties.

Today, after walking away from a six-figure corporate job, Dalton runs an online community of nearly 600 female gamers called the PMS Clan. Brady, meanwhile, is a professional gamer and member of the Ubisoft-created all-women gaming team, the Frag Dolls, under the handle Valkyrie.

Through tournaments and their presence on the Internet, the PMS Clan, Frag Dolls and other teams like the Girlz of Destruction have raised the profile of women gamers, who make up 20 percent of the hard-core gamer demographic, according to market research firm The NPD group.

PMS' professional team and Girlz of Destruction have also grabbed the attention of corporate sponsors Verizon Communications Inc. and VIA Technologies Inc., which help them make a living as pro gamers.

But what has made the PMS Clan a success among women, according to Dalton, is that unlike other groups, PMS focused on building a community rather than seeking out pro gamers. The group laid down a code of conduct for its members that barred players from making negative comments about one another and encouraged everyone to play regardless of their skill level.



"We didn't do things the way a lot of the kids had done it previously," Dalton said in an interview. "When women are having that fun environment to play in, where they are encouraged, they play more."

That's not to say that members of PMS and other gaming teams aren't competitive. PMS members are required to practice eight hours a week and their teams finished in the top eight in a major "Halo 2" tournament last year.

The Frag Dolls have also placed in the top eight in two "Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter" tournaments.

Both games fall under the first-person shooter category, a genre of violent games typically marketed to players fueled on testosterone rather than estrogen.

"These women aren't slouches. They are obviously very talented," said Phaedra Boinodiris, who runs Womengamers.com, a Web site about women and gaming.

Competition aside, however, the common refrain among women gamer groups is that they aim to promote female gamers of all types and grab the attention of game makers who traditionally have focused on creating games for men.

"There are a lot more women who do play, so it's really a matter of the industry marketing to them," said Morgan Romine, 25, a Frag Doll and an online marketing manager at Ubisoft who goes by the game handle Rhoulette.

So far, getting attention hasn't been a challenge for groups like the Frag Dolls, who were recruited by Ubisoft two years ago to help promote its games.

"Girl gamers tend to get a lot of attention because we tend to be the minority," Romine said. "By virtue of being a novelty we usually got a bit of attention."

At the same time, however, the Frag Dolls have been criticized by some in the industry for reinforcing sexual stereotypes because their members are all young and pretty.

But Romine and others said those criticisms simply reinforce the prevailing notion that women who play video games can't be feminine.

"People have a stereotype that gamers in general are ugly and huge and have glasses. It's not how it is anymore," said Louise Thomsen, 26, a member of the Scandinavian team Les Seules. Her game handle is AurorA.

Les Seules - French for "The Only Ones" but in English they call themselves "The Outsiders" - has parlayed its success on the European "Counter-Strike" tournament circuit and its team members' good looks into a planned reality television show.

Founder Sofi Bystrom, 22, whose handle is Sophie, said the team is hoping the show will help them pick up corporate sponsors who would be able to help pay for trips to tournaments.

As Les Seules, the Frag Dolls and others know, for women trying to stand out in an industry dominated by men, being cute is a useful way to get noticed.

"Let's not get away from the power of the boob factor," said Dalton.

## Atari Presents 'The Future of Play' at WIRED NextFest 2006

Atari, Inc., one of the world's most recognized brands and leading third-party video game publisher, Monday announced the Company's sponsorship of WIRED Magazine's WIRED NextFest 2006. As a style-driving brand for decades, the Company will present a remarkable display of the intersection of technology and entertainment at this year's event, Sept. 29-Oct.1, 2006 at the Javits Center in New York City. Atari's Playground pavilion exhibits the impact of the digital revolution on fun and entertainment for consumers of all ages.

"The Atari brand symbolizes innovation and we continue our heritage by presenting tomorrow's technologies and how they will shape interactive entertainment at this year's WIRED NextFest," said Bruno Bonnell, Chief Creative Officer, Atari, Inc. "Never-before-seen objects that communicate - like the Nabaztag and other smart devices - and prototype versions of tomorrow's technologies will be on display. At WIRED NextFest, Atari presents a futuristic experience where interacting with machines for fun and pleasure become natural forms of entertainment."

As the centerpiece of the Playground at WIRED NextFest, Atari presents the Nabaztag Opera, featuring 100 Nabaztag devices. Created by the French company Violet, Nabaztags are the first, interactive wi-fi enabled "smart rabbits" that also double as interactive personal companions. First performed at Paris' Centre Pompidou in May, the Nabaztag Opera makes its debut in America at WIRED NextFest. Composed by Artist and programmer Antoine Schmitt and Music composer and film director, Jean-Jacques Birge, the opera is a musical and choreographic partition in three movements, transmitted via wi-fi, plays on the tension between the music ensemble communion and individual behavior to create a strong and involved showpiece.

Created and produced by WIRED Magazine, and presented by GE, the third annual WIRED NextFest brings together innovations from around the world. WIRED's vision of a new World's Fair will showcase the latest in exploration, entertainment, transportation, health, play (video gaming outside the box), communication, design, security, and green living from visionary inventors and R&D labs worldwide. The Future of Green Living Pavilion will debut at this year's event and two areas have been substantially expanded: Robot Row and The Playground (Future of Play). In all, 130 exhibits - representing 100 leading companies, universities, and inventors from 20 countries - will be presented.

WIRED NextFest 2006 is slated to begin with "Education Day" - free for students and teachers on Thursday, September 28. Staged at New York's Javits Center, WIRED NextFest will be open for General Admission on Friday, September 29 and Saturday, September 30 from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Sunday, October 1 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Ticket information, as well as additional programming, can be found at [www.nextfest.net](http://www.nextfest.net).

Pavilion sponsors for WIRED NextFest include Atari, (Future of Play), Autodesk, (Future of Green Living), Discovery Channel, (Future of Entertainment), General Motors, (Future of Transportation), NASA, (Future of Exploration), Pfizer, (Official Supporter of Education Day) and Intel (Main Stage). Additional sponsors include CITI, Coke Blak, Hilton Garden

Inn and The Science Channel.

### 'Grand Theft Auto,' Driving The Dark Side of Video Games

Since its debut in 1998, top-selling video game franchise "Grand Theft Auto" has been accused of being an evil force driving crime sprees, sexual deviance and health woes.

The Take-Two Interactive video game, in which points are scored for killing, robbing, beating prostitutes and sowing mayhem, has raced ahead despite speed bumps thrown in its path by critics and industry regulators.

New York City-based Rockstar Games, which owns Take-Two, proclaimed in June that "Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories" was the best selling game ever for the PlayStation Portable console made by Sony.

Versions of the game made for other consoles have met with similar success, making it one of the top-selling video game titles of all time.

A few months ago, a jury in Oakland, a city near San Francisco, called for a member of a vicious US gang that played ultra-violent "Grand Theft Auto" by day, then robbed and murdered by night, to be imprisoned for life.

The man had been convicted of four murders, a dozen armed robberies, shooting into a home and a slew of attempted murders and robberies.

While a cause-effect link between the game and the crime spree was not proven, it made sense to prosecutor Darryl Stallworth that committing virtual violent crimes lowered the barrier to bloodshed in the real world.

"It plays a role in the graduation of a murderer," Stallworth told AFP. "Pulling a trigger and watching people bleed is so far beyond the average person's capability that they have to be desensitized."

"If you are playing a game or immersed in any medium that allows you to see it as unreal, you are a candidate for murder."

"Grand Theft Auto" has more than a half-dozen versions set in different US cities, including New York, Miami, Las Vegas, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Points are earned by committing crimes, with more heinous acts reaping greater rewards. Ramming one car into another scores ten points, while killing a cop gets a player 1,000 points, an online summary of the game showed.

Players are given missions to complete and the preferred mode of transportation is stolen car, a crime labeled "Grand Theft Auto" in the California penal code.

"'Grand Theft Auto' video game is sort of a hit list," Stallworth said. "You get rewarded for killing a cop or anything else that gets in the way of your mission."

The US Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) branded "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" with an adults-only rating last year after learning the game had hidden sex scenes that could be unlocked with an after-market

modification called "Hot Coffee."

More than 12 million copies of the game had reportedly been sold by the time its rating was changed and the revenue was estimated at 600 million dollars.

Take-Two fixed the game and provided a software patch to lockout the lascivious scenes.

Take-Two said in a recent release that the New York County district attorney had subpoenaed it for documents regarding what it knew of the "creation, inclusion, and programming" of the sordid scenes.

"Take-Two and Rockstar Games have always worked to keep mature-themed video game content out of the hands of children," Take-Two chief executive Paul Eibeler said in a release during the "Hot Coffee" controversy last year.

"We will continue to work closely with the ESRB and community leaders to improve and better promote a reliable rating system to help consumers make informed choices about which video games are appropriate for each individual."

Since its launch, "Grand Theft Auto" has been hit with civil suits in the United States and Europe by people who blamed the game for driving them to violent acts. There was no record found of such a suit winning in court.

Young men that play "Grand Theft Auto III" were more likely to drink booze, smoke marijuana, and be defiant than those who played a "low-violence" game based on "The Simpsons" cartoon television series, according to a study published this spring in the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine.

"Grand Theft" also caused a rise in the blood pressure of players from homes or neighborhoods troubled by violence, according to the study, based on 100 US college students ages 18 to 21.

"Media violence exposure may play a role in the development of negative attitudes and behaviors related to health," the study concluded. "All youth appear to be at risk for potentially negative outcomes."

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A-ONE's Headline News  
The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

States Offer Web Sites To Help Students

With her first child headed for college this fall and two more soon to follow, Carol Wright was lost. Campus tours, applications, financial aid forms, transcripts, SAT scores, class planning - and that was just the beginning.

"It's unbelievable," the Carrollton, Ga., mother said. "You don't know where to start or what to do. It's trial and error, at the mercy of everybody telling me what to do."

Then she heard about Georgia's year-old Web site, [gacollege411.org](http://gacollege411.org) - a one-stop shop for applying to the state's colleges and requesting financial aid. Modeled after a similar site in North Carolina, Georgia's has already registered more than 100,000 students and families in just 18 months.

Georgia is now among about 35 states with such sites, an effort by education officials to make college more accessible by demystify the daunting application process while making it easier for students to enroll in schools within their borders.

The \$1.5 million site includes free prep classes for the SAT college-entrance exam, a class planner for students entering high school, applications to more than 100 colleges, virtual campus tours and information on getting one of the state's full-ride, lottery-funded scholarships.

Most states' sites have information on every college in the state - both public and private - and what kind of programs are offered.

But they do have private-sector competition, such as [princetonreview.com](http://princetonreview.com).

Rob Franek, publisher of Princeton Review, said his company's site has many of the same features but takes a national perspective. It also includes annual rankings based on student surveys about quality-of-life issues.

"We're unapologetic listeners to student opinion," Franek said.

But some state sites offer advantages unavailable elsewhere, including the ability to electronically apply for state-sponsored scholarships. For the individual states, the sites also help standardize admissions technologies and directly support efforts to bolster access to college.

North Carolina's [cnfc.org](http://cnfc.org), which launched in 2000, has been credited with helping increase the state's college-enrollment rate from 57 percent to 68 percent of high school graduates.

"What we were trying to do is level the playing field," said Bobby Kanoy, senior associate vice president for academic and student affairs with the University of North Carolina system. "We had to get that information in the hands of students and parents who otherwise wouldn't have thought about going to college."

On the majority of the sites, students must register to get access to the features. Once they register, they have an account that they can monitor and update throughout high school, which makes applying for college as simple as a few clicks of the mouse. They can submit applications, letters of recommendation, transcripts and financial aid forms all electronically.

North Carolina, which spends about \$1 million a year to maintain its site, has 1.3 million students and families registered for accounts. After the first year, the site had just 14,000 registered.

"It's very helpful," said 19-year-old Jessica Priddy of Eaton, N.C., who used [cnfc.org](http://cnfc.org) to help determine that she wanted to attend the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, where she is now a sophomore.

Kentucky launched its "Go Higher Kentucky" campaign in 2000, part of which is [gohigherky.com](http://gohigherky.com), the state's college Web site. Since then, the number of high school students going on to college has grown from 55 percent to 62 percent.

"When we launched this, the idea of trying to market higher education was a strange bird," said Jim Applegate with the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. "But today it's catching on. It's a result of the recognition that the success of states and the nation depend on an educated population."

In West Virginia, [wvapply.com](http://wvapply.com) has been running for five years, but the state's higher education policy commission wants to beef up what's offered.

The trend of one-stop college Web sites began in California in 1996 when the 23-campus California State University system saw a need to fill in the gap left by a shortage of college counselors in high schools. Allison Jones, assistant vice chancellor of academic affairs for the Cal State system, said [csumentor.edu](http://csumentor.edu) cut down on the red tape involved in applying to college and reduced the amount of paper required to admit students.

CSU now only prints 100,000 applications, compared with the several million before the Web site. Close to 98 percent of the 500,000 applications received are through the site, he said.

California also has developed a statewide site called [californiacolleges.edu](http://californiacolleges.edu) that gives a comprehensive look at all the colleges in the state rather than just one system.

Liz Dietz, CEO of the Xap Corp., which has created many of the sites across the country, said they are especially popular in the South where states are trying to revive their economies.

"It speaks to a change in economics, moving from agrarian or manufacturing to knowledge based," Dietz said. "Those high-paying agricultural and manufacturing jobs just don't exist any more."

Wright, whose daughter, Kristen Shackelford, is a freshman at LaGrange College in Georgia, said [gacollege411.org](http://gacollege411.org) was especially helpful in finding financial aid.

"We were looking for major scholarship opportunities," she said. "It was hunt and peck in different places, where this was everything in one spot."

#### Microsoft Spinoff Wallop Launches Test

Wallop, a startup spun out of Microsoft Corp.'s research lab, is launching the test version of an online social networking site with the premise that people will want to pay extra to look good.

The company, which aims to compete with established brands like MySpace and Facebook, plans to sell graphics and other features people can use to decorate their personal profile pages.

Wallop says the plan to charge users for the decorations will supplant the advertising that supports many such free sites. The add-ons will initially cost somewhere between 99 cents and \$4, said Karl Jacob, the San Francisco

company's chief executive. The company will offer some elements for free.

People will only be able to sign up for the service if an existing member invites them, an approach Facebook is about to abandon.

Wallop has its origins in a Microsoft research project that goes back several years. In the interim, News Corp.'s MySpace has emerged as a market leader in the now-hot field of forging and maintaining friendships online.

MySpace already lets users customize pages for free, though users typically have to find HTML code elsewhere to post into their profiles. Some visitors have complained that flashy icons and colorful lettering in such customized profiles can make them difficult to read.

### Facebook Opens Site To Everyone

Perhaps in preparation for an imminent sale, Facebook has now opened its doors to everyone.

The social networking site, which competes with MySpace and others, has also put in place additional privacy features, according to a posting on the site's blog on Tuesday.

Facebook, which began as a social networking site for students, originally required an educational (.edu) email address. Later the site opened itself up to professionals. Now, the site simply requires a verified email address to register.

Facebook is estimated to have about 9.5 million members, and is considered to be the number-two social networking site behind MySpace. Its popularity has made the target of sale rumors involving Yahoo.

"You've heard it before, and you'll hear it again; here at Facebook, we want to help people understand their world," Carolyn Abram, Facebook's "resident blogger," wrote in a post. "We started at one school, and realized over and over again that this site was useful to everyone-not just to Harvard students, not just to college students, not just to students, not just to former students. We've kept growing to accommodate this fact.

"This includes your friends who graduated pre-Facebook (yes, there was such a time), your friends who don't have school or work email addresses, and your friends whose schools don't give out email addresses," Abram wrote. "Now you can all connect."

The site also added additional privacy controls, even after new features were added earlier this month following a user protest.

Students with .edu email addresses will be considered verified, as are members of work or corporate networks. Each network will be considered exclusive, and users can set permissions to allow or bar others from discovering their name, viewing their picture, or contacting them.

Users without verified email addresses will be required to provide a mobile phone number for verification purposes, or, failing that, will be required to enter the "word in a box" security features now common to most sites with community bulletin boards.

Users also will have the option of reporting "spam" to the site's owners, Facebook said.

### Media Free To Roam in China During 2008 Games

Foreign media will be free to travel around China and enjoy uncensored access to the Internet during the 2008 Beijing Olympics, organizers said on Wednesday.

Non-Chinese journalists currently need permission to move around the country, while websites containing material considered sensitive by the Chinese government are frequently blocked.

"We have no restrictions on travel for foreign journalists in China," Sun Weijia, BOCOG's head of media operations, told the Olympic World Press Briefing on Wednesday.

"So once they get the visa, they can travel anywhere in China."

Liu Qi, president of the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG), said detailed new regulations on the operation of foreign media would be put into place early in 2007.

"The latest legislation is going through the necessary procedures," Liu said. "These new rules will consider the norms of the past Games and the needs of the media."

"The Chinese government will honor our promises and commitments made during our bid to host the Games."

Media services head Li Jingbo said the Internet service provided to news services at the Games would be uncensored.

Organizers also told the briefing that foreign media would have access to the Chinese team, although journalists would have to apply three weeks in advance to interview local Olympians before the Games.

### Corporate Users Want To Solve Tech Problems Using Online Chat

Seventy percent of corporate users who have used online-chat to resolve their consumer problems say they'd also like to use online-chat to fix technology snafus in the office, according to a new survey.

Online chat between help-desk workers and users could be more convenient and faster way to solve technical problems at work than using the phone or email for many employees, according to a survey of 301 individuals by Decipher, Inc., an independent online market research firm. The survey was commissioned by SupportSoft Inc., a maker of technical support automation software and services.

Each of the survey respondents use a PC daily on the job, are employed by companies with more than 1,000 workers, and have used web-chat for customer-service or technical assistance outside of their workplace.



Of those surveyed, 69% said they'd want to use web-chat to solve technical problems at work. Seventy-one percent think web-chat is the most convenient way to resolve their technology problems; 52% thought it would be the fastest; and 42% thought it would be the easiest method.

When it comes to help-desk staff helping users with some software and hardware problems, "the phone will never go away," admits Bruce Mowery, VP of marketing at SupportSoft, which provides self-service and other "multi-channel" technical support products, including web-chat software, to enterprise customers.

However, many users are finding that web-chat can help them avoid playing phone tag with technical support staff and elicits faster resolutions to problems than email, says Mowery. Also, for situations where support is provided to U.S.-based users by technical staff located offshore, "web chat removes the heavy accent," he says.

For help-desk staff, SupportSoft's products allows each technician to run four chat sessions simultaneously.

But while web-chat is a preferred way for some employees to address their simple "level one" category problems, like having difficulty accessing a software application on a PC, there are just some situations that warrant elevated attention, Mowery says.

"Level two or three problems, such as having a blue screen, having to give a presentation in 10 minutes and having the CEO breathing down your neck" often means needing someone on-the-scene and on-site to help, he admits.

#### Official Sues Students Over MySpace Page

A high school assistant principal is suing two students and their parents, alleging the teens set up a Web page on MySpace.com in her name and posted obscene comments and pictures.

Anna Draker, an assistant principal at Clark High School, is claiming defamation, libel, negligence and negligent supervision over the page on the popular free-access Web site.

Draker claims two 16-year-olds, a junior and a sophomore, created the page using her name and picture and wrote it as though Draker herself had posted the information, according to Draker's attorney, Murphy Klasing.

Draker found out in April that someone had created a page on MySpace. It had been up about a month before she discovered it.

The site falsely identified Draker as a lesbian. Klasing said Draker, who is married and has small children, was "devastated."

MySpace.com removed the page when Draker told them it wasn't hers.

One of the students also is facing criminal felony charges.

Bexar County Assistant District Attorney Jill Mata would not release information about the case, but confirmed that juvenile charges are pending against a local high school student involving retaliation and fraudulent

use of identifying information. Both are third-degree felonies.

Draker is suing for an unspecified amount for damages for emotional distress, mental anguish, lost wages and court costs.

### PayPal In Settlement Deal With 28 States

PayPal, the online payments unit of EBay Inc. has agreed with attorneys general from 28 U.S. states to improve how it notifies users of their consumer rights, the company said on Thursday.

Under the deal, PayPal will also pay \$1.7 million to the states.

In addition, PayPal said it reached a settlement in a proposed class action lawsuit by PayPal customers in a U.S. federal court in Brooklyn. PayPal agreed to set up a settlement fund of \$3.5 million, less court costs and attorneys fees.

PayPal said it will, among other things, shorten and streamline its user agreement and communicate more information relating to its protection programs. The company said it has already complied with many of the voluntary deal's terms.

Changes include shortening the user notice that PayPal customers agree to when signing up for the company's services. PayPal also agreed to clarify the buyer protections consumers have when conducting online financial transactions.

"It (the settlement) has to do with consumer protections between buyers and sellers when you make a transaction," said PayPal spokeswoman Amanda Pires. "We are in the process of doing a lot of these things."

Under the terms of the settlement deals, PayPal is not admitting any liability for any of the allegations in the two cases, PayPal said.

The state attorneys general involved in the deal represent Alabama, Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Washington and West Virginia.

The federal lawsuit was filed in 2005 on behalf of a class alleging PayPal did not clearly communicate information about its consumer protection programs related to specific types transactions.

The legal settlement will be presented for preliminary approval to the U.S. District Court in the coming months.

### Criminals Flock To The Internet

Criminals are increasingly trying to trick citizens into giving them their bank account details, according to a survey published on Monday which showed such "phishing" attempts almost doubled in the first six months.

Over 157,000 unique phishing messages were sent out around the world in the first half of 2006, an increase of 81 percent compared with the six-month period to end-December 2005.

Each message can go to thousands or hundreds of thousands of consumers, according to the bi-annual Internet Security Threat Report from security software vendor Symantec.

"Organized crime is here and they are very interested in phishing. They target home users who have become the weakest link," said research scientist Ollie Whitehouse.

Phishers send around emails, pretending to be a financial institution or other legitimate organization, and ask to verify personal information such as account numbers and passwords.

They target their victims much more closely than before, by tracking down full names and personal interests.

"They skim social networking sites and personal websites. Most people, by now, have left a digital footprint which can be mined," Whitehouse said.

Another trend in the first half of the year is that phishers have become more sophisticated, dodging spam filters and other defense mechanisms designed by service providers and software companies to keep out the criminals.

How much financial damage phishers have caused is unclear and usually at an individual level, which is why phishing does not get the same media attention as "denial of service attacks" aimed to take out a specific web site, or email worms which can shut down millions of computers in a digital equivalent of a carpet bombing.

The Internet is still under fire from such attacks, taking about 6,110 different denial of service hits every a day, but unlike a few years ago they cause less damage.

"A successful 'denial of server' attack or worm can have ramifications far beyond phishing. Worms have taken down electricity grids. That's why critical infrastructure is now much more resilient. Information technology managers are better prepared and networks are more robust," Whitehouse said.

Increased focus on security, and a willingness from software companies to own up to their mistakes, has dramatically cut down the time that computers are at risk, Symantec found.

Internet Explorer, the world's most popular browser from Microsoft, has cut the number of days in which hackers can exploit a security flaw to nine days from 25 days six months earlier.

Security holes in browsers from Opera and Mozilla Firefox are patched within two days and one day respectively.

"Vendors are taking this much more seriously," Whitehouse said.

In the past, virus writers seeking fame and attention wrote their malicious programs to spread as quickly and broadly as possible, boasting to colleagues when they manage to cripple hundreds of thousands of computers worldwide in a matter of hours.

But now, many writers are driven by money instead. They write code to turn the computers of unsuspecting individuals into "botnets" - networks for spreading junk e-mail or stealing financial data from others.

Security experts find that some are even taking measures to make sure their programs don't spread too quickly or too broadly, lest they get detected and blocked.

"If they are able to stay active longer, they make more money," said Alfred Huger, senior director of engineering with the security response team at Symantec Corp., a software vendor that issued its twice-annual state-of-security report Monday.

Not too long ago, he said, a single person took control of as many as 400,000 computers at once with the help of malicious programs. Today, the average is less than 1,000, making such networks more difficult to track and shut down.

Huger said spammers have been compiling e-mail lists specific to geographic areas, by targeting a single Internet service provider that serves a particular region or by combing mailing lists devoted to a city's happenings. Messages sent to those lists can be used for scams or the spread of malicious programs, such as those for stealing data.

Virus writers have also judiciously used Web sites with software vulnerabilities allowing for the spread of malicious code, Huger said. They will remove the malicious programs once enough users are infected and restore the malware later, he said.

"They are very careful about the spread," he said.

Many of the newer viruses spread primarily through social engineering - tricking a user into opening an e-mail attachment by making a message appear legitimate.

Although virus writers have long used that technique, many had been trying to overcome delays inherent with the need for any user intervention, taking advantage of system flaws to automatically spread their programs.

Network worms such as 2004's "Sasser" exploited flaws in Microsoft Corp.'s Windows operating system, automatically scanning the Internet for computers with the vulnerability and sending copies of themselves there. But the rapid spread also triggered rapid-response alerts among security vendors and prompted network operators to prioritize applying fixes to the Windows flaws.

High-profile threats, often more an annoyance than an effort to set up armies of rogue computers, are typically contained within a day or two.

By contrast, botnet computers can stay active for months.

Billionaire investor and dot-com veteran Mark Cuban had harsh words on Thursday for YouTube, the online site that lets people share video clips, saying only a "moron" would purchase the wildly popular start-up.

Cuban, co-founder of HDNet and owner of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, also said YouTube would eventually be "sued into oblivion" because of copyright violations.

"They are just breaking the law," Cuban told a group of advertisers in New York. "The only reason it hasn't been sued yet is because there is nobody with big money to sue."

YouTube, based in San Mateo, California, specializes in serving up short videos created by everyday people. Its popularity, with more than 100 million video showings daily, has spurred speculation the firm will be sold or taken public.

But YouTube has also come under scrutiny because users often post copyrighted material, including music videos produced by well-established artists.

YouTube company representatives were not immediately available to respond to Cuban's comments.

Cuban said "anyone who buys that (YouTube) is a moron" because of potential lawsuits from copyright violations.

"There is a reason they haven't yet gone public, they haven't sold. It's because they are going to be toasted," said Cuban, who has sold start-ups to Yahoo Inc. and CompuServe.

YouTube, which has nearly one-third of the U.S. Web video audience, three times that of Google Inc., or twice that of News Corp's MySpace, has been working on signing licensing deals with music companies and TV networks to ensure they are paid when users view their content.

This month YouTube unveiled its first deal to distribute music videos legally from a major music company by agreeing a deal with Warner Music Group, home to pop stars James Blunt and Madonna.

In other remarks, meanwhile, the often-controversial Cuban also told advertisers that the reach of YouTube is limited, particularly when it comes to user-generated videos.

"User-generated content is not going away," he said. "But do you want your advertising dollars spent on a video of Aunt Jenny watching her niece tap dance?"

"Somebody puts up something really good and you get, what, 60,000 viewers?" Cuban added during the event at Advertising Week in New York.

YouTube now offers advertising through banner ads, promotions and sponsorships. It has said it plans to roll out a range of different advertising options over the coming year.

Cuban cautioned advertisers against investing heavily in so-called viral campaigns that are spread by users beyond their initial point of distribution on YouTube or other video sharing sites. But he touted

opportunities to run commercials on high-definition television such as his HDNet network.

"What makes viral so special is it's so hard to do. It's so hard to plan. It's hard to stand out," he said, describing 99 percent of money advertisers spend on viral campaigns as "wasted."

"You guys love to be the trailing edge," he said.

#### New Law To Create Online Budget Database

President Bush said Tuesday that Americans will now be able to "Google their tax dollars," as he signed a law to create an online database for tracking about \$1 trillion in government spending on grants and contracts.

The law is aimed preventing wasteful spending by opening the federal budget to greater scrutiny. The information is already available, but the Web site would make it easier for those who aren't experts on the process to see how taxpayer dollars are being spent.

"Information on earmarks will no longer be hidden deep in the pages of a federal budget bill, but just a few clicks away," Bush said in a signing ceremony. "This legislation will give the American people a new tool to hold their government accountable for spending decisions. When those decisions are made in broad daylight, they will be wiser and they will be more restrained."

Bush signed the bill in the Old Executive Office Building next to the White House, sitting before lawmakers and Internet bloggers who helped get it through Congress.

Senate leaders had tried to pass the bill in early August but Rep. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, and Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., blocked passage by lodging secret "holds" on the bill. The bloggers tracked down those responsible for the delay and the senators let the bill advance under the pressure.

The law calls for the Web site to go online by Jan. 1, 2008. It will list federal grants and contracts greater than \$25,000, except for those classified for national security reasons.

"The Web site will allow our citizens to go online, type in the name of any company, association, or state or locality and find out exactly what grants and contracts they've been awarded," Bush said.

"By allowing Americans to Google their tax dollars, this new law will help taxpayers demand greater fiscal discipline," Bush said.

#### The World Wide Waste of Time

Many employees spend most of their work day tapping diligently at their computers and looking intently at their screens - but how many are updating their blog or sending funny e-mails instead of typing up that important memo, or responding to customer requests?

Some studies have suggested that the wealth of digital diversions have put a number of non-work options at employees' fingertips, and companies foot the bill for their play time.

Last year, Internet management software firm Burstek surveyed over 10,000 employees about their business and personal use and found that across all industries, workers spent around 20 percent of their Internet time on personal business or for entertainment. For some employees, all Internet use was purely personal.

In the Burstek study, online shopping was the biggest time-waster for employees using the Internet for personal reasons, followed by entertainment sites, personal e-mail, sports, chat rooms, job searches, and game playing.

About 8 percent of the sites visited could pose potential legal liability to employers, such as sites that offer pornography or gambling.

Government agencies have the highest incidence of employees accessing sites that contained spyware and malicious code, but industry wide, about 19 percent of employees visited these questionable Internet regions.

"Productivity will vary from one organization to another," says Beverly Lambright, Burstek director of operations. "Sometimes, a special event like March Madness will bring some companies to a screeching halt."

Also last year, another Internet management firm, Websense did a survey with Harris Interactive that found it was closer to 50 percent of employees who accessed the Internet for personal reasons at work. Based on the statistic, Websense estimates that U.S. corporations lose more than \$178 billion annually from squandered productivity.

In order to clamp down on employee playtime, many companies have new hires sign a technology use policy, which often states that the computer owned by the company can't be used for personal business.

But such boilerplate language can be tricky, says John Challenger, chief executive officer of outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas. Making all personal communication and surfing verboten on company devices could end up actually harming productivity, he believes. And Challenger also stated such policies may reflect a failure to acknowledge the way that people work in our techno age.

"The verdict is still out in terms of how companies ought to think about the Internet in their offices, but I know that many are convinced it's a great productivity leak, leading them to put in programs to prevent employees from using the Internet for personal endeavors," he says.

Such thinking seems like a holdover from another era, he adds, similar to how companies once looked for employees that had been with previous employers for at least a decade. Companies now value an array of experience even if it looks like job-hopping, Challenger says, and along those lines, they should remodel their thinking about personal versus professional computing time.

"In the 21st century, the boundary between work and home is blurred, if not erased completely," he says. "People check their e-mail or do work when they're commuting, or on weekends, or even on vacation. Work has permeated home time, so it only seems fair that companies ought to be much more open

to people blending personal tasks into their so-called work time."

To gauge a productivity loss, Challenger suggests that employers look at overall work achievement, not how many hours are lost during the eight hours of office time. It's possible that employees who seem to be goofing off on Hotmail during the day are actually doing a few hours of work at home every night, or tweaking presentations on the weekend.

That's not to say that a company should simply give employees free rein to surf whenever they like, he says. But giving them some flexibility goes a long way toward making them like their jobs, and that in turn drives productivity.

"We're slowly moving toward a system of salary that pays based on tenure, output, performance, and quality instead of one that depends on someone sitting in the same place for eight hours," he says. "Internet use should be the same. If someone wants to take a quick break and send an e-mail to a friend, it seems to me that should be part of the bargain to keep an employee happy, as long as they're productive."

In some cases, crafting an Internet usage policy will depend on the type of work that's being done, notes JupiterResearch analyst Joe Wilcox. Rather than come up with boilerplate language for contracts, companies will likely need to think more deeply about how the Internet is used - and allegedly abused - within their office walls.

For example, if a customer service representative has only a set number of scripts, it doesn't make sense to give him Internet access, Wilcox notes. But if the employee is a government analyst or corporate researcher, blocking access could prove counter-productive to their goals, and they'll probably spend a significant amount of time requesting lifts on such barriers.

As the use of the Internet and the spread of Wi-Fi hotspots makes the Web even more ubiquitous, it's likely that companies will need to look at their internal culture, current usage levels, productivity goals, and even employee habits to determine what type of restrictions are necessary.

"Absolutely the Web can be a timesink if improperly used," says Wilcox. "But so can the coffee machine. How many times do people leave their desks to get a cup of coffee and come back 45 minutes later, because they were talking about the latest episode of 'Lost' or something? Companies need to acknowledge that the Internet is just one of many potential distractions."

Beyond looking at the productivity of departments and divisions, companies could create policies that go all the way down to the individual level. Although some in a company might balk at the lack of standardized policy, an enterprise could point out that different jobs require different levels of online access.

In restricting sites like Yahoo or Amazon.com, companies will need to be aware of one final factor in crafting policies: employee morale. If staff members are achieving their productivity goals and working well, a few minutes spent shopping or on personal e-mail isn't going to break a company. But if productivity levels dip and there's a correlation to increased Internet usage, that's when more restrictive controls should be considered.

Even with a multi-tiered Internet usage policy in place, though, JupiterResearch's Wilcox agrees with Challenger that there should be some



room to break the rules. "Let's say some planes hit the World Trade Center," he says. "Don't tell me you want your employees to think about being productive instead of checking the news online."

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